



Photo by T. Whitaker

**NATURAL FOCUS**



**Community-based Ecotourism** provides an opportunity to exchange knowledge and understanding between visitors and the local community, promoting the culture and natural environment. It provides encouragement and empowerment in the community and an awareness in all people of the need to live in harmony with each other and nature. In addition, ecotourism creates an acceptance of the differences between people and cultures.

**The Hill Area and Community Development Foundation (HADF)** has undertaken community development work in Chiang Rai, Thailand since 1986. HADF operates on the philosophy of respect for the people's wisdom, culture and traditional knowledge, with a commitment to full participation by the people.



**NATURAL FOCUS** was formed by HADF in collaboration with the Hill Tribe people for community-based ecotourism for sustainability. Profits are used in the HADF community development programme. Both the villages involved and the villagers themselves benefit through this programme, but also earn alternative income through participating in the ecotourism venture by providing accommodation, meals, handicrafts and by taking on the roles of guides and local experts.



**NATURAL FOCUS** provides an opportunity to learn about nature and the culture and traditions of the Hill Tribe people of northern Thailand. Participating villages, selected because of their preservation of their culture and environment, provide a range of different cultures and lifestyles. Ecotours and activities vary throughout the year, depending on the agricultural season and festivals of each Hill Tribe.

Programmes can be developed to suit the needs of the group. Base programmes, ranging from 1 to 15 days include;

1. **Ecotours** allow participants to experience the lifestyle of different Hill Tribes. Ecotours learn about living in the forest. Villagers retain a traditional self-sufficient lifestyle.
2. **Workstay** participants live in one village and assist the villagers with community development. Projects range from building meeting halls, schools and drinking water systems to cutting fire breaks and health assessments.
3. **Craft and trade workshops** provide an opportunity to learn techniques used by the Hill Tribe people. This includes basket weaving, cloth weaving, embroidery and metal smithing.

Workshops are based at the Natural Resource Centre and combined with day trips to visit other artisans.

4. **Youth programmes** are planned to develop an understanding and sense of responsibility towards ecological systems and to learn how different cultures live. Programmes are based at the Natural Resources Centre, where participants can camp or stay in dormitories. The programme is flexible, and can be developed to suit holiday or study tours.

**Activities**, depending on the programme include: forest walk to gather food and cook using bamboo utensils, crafts, trades, traditional story telling, dancing and music. Thai cooking courses are also available.

**The Natural Resource Centre** is located at Mae Salong. The Centre is available for conferences and workshops. Study tours can be arranged.





**The Hill Tribes**, with a population of over 1 million people, live in small scattered villages in the mountainous areas of northern and western Thailand. The 9 main tribes, Akha, Lahu, Lisu, Mien, Hmong, H'tin, Lua, and Karen originated in China and Burma, migrating into Thailand over the last 150 years. Most people were fleeing from persecution and the migration continues today.

Upon arrival in Thailand, the Hill Tribes chose to live in the highland areas, similar to their homelands, in harmony with nature. Food and non-timber products are collected from the forests and rivers. While the sale of timber is prohibited by the villagers themselves, they may cut timber for their own use. The villagers spend time in the forest collecting resources. They know how to harvest sustainably and to use all parts.

The people have traditionally practiced shifting cultivation of corn and rice, supplemented with hunting and gathering. However, increased pressure on land has required them to change agricultural practices.

**Challenges** are part of the daily lives of Hill Tribe people. Many do not have Thai citizenship. This lack of status excludes them from most human rights. Without citizenship, they cannot own land, vote, drive a car, leave the district without a visa, or receive standard wages, access to schools or healthcare.

While the Hill Tribe people see themselves as having separate cultural identities, they still consider themselves to be Thai people. They realise the need to conserve nature, and fully participate in the development of Thailand as a nation.



**Ecotourism** is one way of making others aware of the situation of the Hill Tribe people. Your stay in the village will encourage villagers to conserve their culture, traditions and environment. The villagers enjoy learning about your own culture and feel that they "can travel throughout the world without leaving the village".

For information and bookings:

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